

REMARKS

Applicants thank the Examiner for the thorough consideration given the present application. Claims 13-20, 28, 29, 31-33, 36, and 40-55 are pending in this application. Claim 38 has been canceled without prejudice to or disclaimer of the subject matter set forth therein. Claims 1-12, 21-27, 30, 34, 35, 37, and 39 were previously canceled. Claims 13, 28, 29, 31, 36, 40, 48, and 55 are amended. Claims 13, 40, 48, and 55 are independent. The method set forth in each of independent claims 13, 40, 44, and 55 does not require that the claimed steps be performed in the claimed order or sequence.

Reconsideration of this application, as amended, is respectfully requested.

Allowable Subject Matter

The Examiner states that claims 28, 29, 31-33, 36, and 38 would be allowable if rewritten in independent form.

In response, as pointed out above, each of independent claims 13, 40, 48, and 55 has been amended to include the allowable subject matter of objected-to claim 38. Claim 38 has been canceled.

Thus, each of independent claims 13, 40, 48, and 55 is in condition for allowance.

Examiner Interview Requested

The Applicants sincerely appreciate the courtesies extended by Examiner Taghi T. Arani to the Applicants' Representative, Carl T. Thomsen, Registration No. 50, 786, during the face-

to-face interview conducted on November 22, 2005. (See Examiner's Interview Summary.) Based on discussions in the interview, the Applicants filed a Supplement Amendment on November 30, 2005, making the changes suggested by the Examiner and agreed to by the Applicants, and assuming the application was in condition for allowance.

Inasmuch as the Examiner has cited new grounds for rejection in this latest Office Action, and in order to accelerate the prosecution of the present application, it is respectfully requested that another interview be granted with the Applicants' Representative. The Applicants' Representative, Carl T. Thomsen, Registration No. 50,786, is available at the Examiner's convenience (Tel: 703-208-4030) to discuss the claims as amended in this Amendment and to answer any questions the Examiner may have regarding the patentability of the present invention.

Claim Rejections Under 35 U.S.C. §102(e) and §103(a)

First of all, the claim numbers mentioned by the Examiner in the rejections described in paragraph 5, pages 4 and 5 of the Office Action are inconsistent. The Applicants assume that the rejections made by the Examiner are as follows:

Claims 13-20 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being anticipated by Wiser et al. U.S. 6,330,675);

Claims 40, 44, 48, 51, 54, and 55 (**and not claims 13-20**) are rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being anticipated by Saito (U.S. 5,867,579);

claims 51 and 54 (**and not claims 41 and 49**) are rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being

anticipated by Saito in view of Ishibaski (U.S. 6,021,199);

claims 41-43, 46, 49, 50, 52, and 53 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being anticipated by Saito in view of Ishibaski; and

claim 47 is rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being anticipated by Saito et al. in view of Ishibaski and further in view of Wiser et al. (U.S. 6,330,675).

These rejections are respectfully traversed.

As mentioned above, while not conceding the appropriateness of any of the rejections, but merely to expedite the prosecution of the instant application, each of independent claims 13, 40, 48, and 55 has been amended to include the allowable subject matter of objected-to claim 38.

In view of the foregoing, it is respectfully submitted that the applied prior art of record does not disclose or render obvious the present invention as recited in each of independent claims 13, 40, 48, and 55. It is respectfully submitted that independent claims 13, 40, 48, and 55 are allowable.

Since the dependent claims depend from the allowable independent claims, they should also be allowable for at least the reasons set forth above, as well as for the additional features provided by these claims.

Accordingly, all pending claims should be in condition for allowance.

*Application No. 09/527,670
Amendment dated May 22, 2006
Reply to Office Action dated February 21, 2006*

*Docket No. 0630-0983P
Art Unit: 2131
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CONCLUSION

All of the stated grounds of rejection have been properly traversed, accommodated, or rendered moot. It is believed that a full and complete response has been made to the outstanding Office Action, and that the present application is in condition for allowance.

If any issues remain, however, the Examiner is invited to telephone Carl T. Thomsen (Reg. No. 50, 786) at 703-205-8000 in an effort to expedite prosecution.

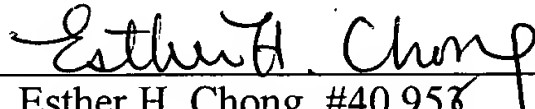
If necessary, the Commissioner is hereby authorized in this, concurrent, and future replies to charge payment or credit any overpayment to Deposit Account No. 02-2448 for any additional fees required under 37 C.F.R. §§ 1.16 or 1.17, particularly extension of time fees.

Respectfully submitted,

BIRCH, STEWART, KOLASCH & BIRCH, LLP

Date: May 22, 2006


EHC/CTT/eb

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